

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 636

UD 021 928

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 TITLE Change Agents in Inner-City Schools.
 PUB DATE [74]
 NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; *Change Agents; *Change Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Dissemination; *Institutional Characteristics; Organizational Change; *Power Structure; School Community Relationship; School Role; Teacher Attitudes; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

The educational institution's resistance to change may be attributed to its non-profit motive, domesticated service role, bureaucratic structure, and the fact that its existence is ensured by law. The characteristics likely to contribute to the success of change agent in school settings are: (1) a high social status within the faculty of the institution in which change is desired; (2) the ability to be a professional educator who can illustrate direct relationships between the cultural orientation of the school and the methods of instruction used by the teachers; (3) an awareness of the informal structure of faculty members within the formal structure of the school; (4) an understanding of the power structure and dynamics of the community; (5) an ability to foster an attitude of collaboration among peers; (6) a willingness to work without assurance of reward or benefits; and (7) the ability to disseminate information to the community, and to formulate and implement a plan of action conducive to change. (JCD)

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Introduction

For years, educators in our society have been confronted with the resistance of public educational institutions to change. This problem has been especially difficult for educators in inner-city schools. In this paper, Dr. Smith categorizes institutions according to their activities and analyzes the characteristics of those institutions which are most resistant to change. After outlining the functions of the institutions manifesting the most resistance to change and illustrating why the school fits into this category, he presents specific activities in which educators in urban schools must engage to bring about some change in these institutions.

Change: Characteristic of American Society

One of the predominant characteristics in society today is the element of change. With the advent and impact of developments in technology, advances occur with such rapidity that it is often difficult to keep pace with constantly emerging changes.

While some established institutions may recognize this impact, still they feel a need to maintain a degree of stability of the status quo if only for survival purposes. As such, they are reluctant to make change. In fact, even minor institutional changes come only after a very slow and lengthy process.

In spite of the fact that most institutions tend to resist change, some are less resistant than others. Institutions whose existence depends upon the degree to which their product is easily identifiable, measurable, and vital to the lives of people tend to be susceptible to change.¹

If General Motors Company, for example, fails to sell enough cars to make a profit for its stockholders, then, something will change within that organization so that its product will be desired and purchased by more people. It is axiomatic. The organization functions on a profit motive. It exists to satisfy customers to assure more profits for the company. Then again, in the medical profession, once a new drug or procedure has been introduced and tested to the satisfaction of Federal Medical Examiners, the medicine or procedure is usually put to use widely and quickly to provide the best services possible to benefit the most people.

On the other hand, in institutions in which little relationship exists between their existence and the quality of their product, change is more difficult to achieve. Irrespective of the quality of the product of these

institutions, their existence in society is assured in that continued life is guaranteed by need. One such institution is the public school in America where little relationship exists between the quality of work of the school and its continued existence as an institution. To support this observation, all one has to do is review educational achievements of youngsters particularly in inner-city schools to realize that public schools continue to exist regardless of the quality of work. Because life is assured regardless to performance, public schools are extremely slow to change. Many other factors contribute to this existing practice:

Non-Profit Motive

The profit motive existing in some institutions which force them to be sensitive to the needs of their consumers generally does not exist in education.

In fact, current salary plans and schedules reward long preparation and long years of service so that, in reality, there is nothing to gain in the way of economic incentives for teachers who are judged more capable than others. A teacher is basically rewarded for remaining in a system for a long time and for pursuing personal educational development by accumulating academic credits beyond the bachelor's degree. In theory, both of these developments should increase a teacher's ability to deliver services to children; however, in fact, neither does.

Domesticated Organization

The public school is a domesticated organization.² Organizational theorists develop classification for organizations according to elements or characteristics. If an organization or institution is concerned with delivering services to people, that organization is classified as a service organization. If it is concerned with production, then, it is classified as a production organization.³ Schools, by nature of their purpose and function,

are service organizations. A service organization is further delineated according to the methods used in client selection and client voluntary or involuntary participation in the institution.⁴

Institutions with the freedom to select participants from among volunteers are called wild organizations and, as such must struggle for survival.⁵ The success of wild organizations and indeed their survival depend directly on their performance and the quality of the services they offer. One such example of a wild organization is a summer camp. The nature and quality of the activities offered in a summer camp determine the future existence of the camp. If parents and participants are not satisfied with the services of the summer camp program, then, they will not avail themselves of the camp's services.

Domesticated institutions, however, are protected and secure in many ways. Their clients must participate and institutions do not have the freedom or the latitude to select them from among volunteers. These institutions must take and work with everyone assigned to them with the knowledge that they (institutions) are perpetuated regardless of performance.

Domesticated organizations are usually assured vital protection permitting them to overlook some of the needs which wild organizations find it essential to satisfy. Public schools are assured by law that they will not go out of existence.

Bureaucratic Structure

Educational endeavors are usually operated in bureaucratic structures and the bureaucracy by definition and function exists to resist change. The basic elements of bureaucracy are specialization of tasks, centralization of responsibility, and standardization of procedures.⁶ In order to function in this fashion, the bureaucracy is characterized by a hierarchical structure

with prescribed competencies indicating skills needed to function effectively in a given position. An extensive set of files and records outlining the procedures one must follow in accomplishing various tasks is vital to the existence of the bureaucracy.

One of the by-products of the bureaucratic organizational structure is that persons within the structure are forced to be more concerned with stability and consistency of operational procedures than with the quality of work. People within the bureaucracy are directly accountable to immediate supervisors who evaluate them on the basis of the degree to which the subordinate's behavior contributes to a smoothly operating program. This development means that one is judged effective and competent when his behavior is consistent with the rules outlining what that behavior should be irrespective of the quality of the end product. Those individuals suggesting change or functioning in such a way that change may be the end result will receive little support for their efforts. In most instances, they will have to overcome many and varied hurdles, such as resistance from administrators and/or peer pressures just to survive in the institution.

People Create Change

Changes which are sought in schools must come through teachers and administrators. This factor essentially means, then, that teachers must make changes before their behavior can result in some meaningful change in the educational system. Teachers must be influenced to modify their perception of reality and accompany this modification with performances flowing directly from the changed point of view.

The behavioral sciences teach us that people learn the accepted and expected modes of behavior from the general culture of society and from the groups to which they belong and which are important to them.⁷ Additionally,

people work in occupations which differ in the source of learning and in the skills and behaviors expected of them.

There are four recognizable sources of learning for persons in various occupations:

- (1) People learn from the general culture; that is, they learn from homes, family groups, schools and churches. For example, one learns parenthood and child rearing from the general culture;
- (2) People learn on the job by actual practice with little if any formal training. Driving a taxi or becoming a skilled carpenter is an example of this kind of learning;
- (3) People learn through formal training; that is, they learn through some kind of apprenticeship program in which few individuals are permitted to participate, such as, becoming a plumber or developing the skill to be an electrician; and
- (4) People learn through formal education; that is, they learn through highly specialized educational programs at universities which are limited to a selected few, such as becoming a physician or lawyer.⁸

The ease of introducing change into a work group is closely related to the source of learning and nature of tasks involved in the occupation. Where the knowledge and skill are scientific and technical in nature and learned at a college or university after a person has developed considerable maturity, innovations geared toward changing operating procedures in a given field will generally be readily accepted.⁹

Change is the hardest to achieve, however, where the knowledge, skills, and behaviors are learned from the general culture beginning early in life and where they are associated with respected groups and institutions like the family and the church or with beloved individuals like parents, ministers,

and teachers. In these instances, then, folk ways and customs tend to shape one's behavior more than formal training.¹⁰

In one instance, the role or behavior is defined by scientists and expert practitioners. In another instance, however, it is defined by the conventional wisdom of society supported and buttressed by attitudes, beliefs and identifications which are value loaded and tend to be supported by feelings of love and loyalty to those from whom they are learned. Through an unconscious process taking place over a period of time, the second set of behaviors have been learned and internalized. That being the case, they do not yield readily to relearning or to suggestions of change agents or innovators.

In spite of the fact that educators are required to participate in a lengthy process prior to their becoming practitioners, numerous research findings clearly indicate that the nature of their relationships with children is heavily dependent upon their personal childhood experiences with adults. Attitudes about child rearing are similar to the attitudes of those individuals who composed their primary group during their formative years.¹¹ Another predictive factor in the teaching-learning situation is that, generally speaking, teachers teach the way they have been taught. Their methods and techniques are more dependent on other educational activities in undergraduate and/or graduate school.¹²

The essential question in this situation is how the dynamics operating in the school setting affect the role of the change agent in the inner-city school. For example, what does it mean to be a change agent in a domesticated, non-profit motive institution whose operation is circumscribed by a bureaucracy which is characterized by rigidity and stability? What does it mean to be a change agent in a situation in which rewards are linked to longevity in a system rather than to the quality of products? What does it mean to be a change agent in a situation where the behavior of teachers and

administrators to be changed is deeply rooted in the views of reality which began in their formative years and solidified as they matured? What kind of person must one be to be successful in this situation? In what kinds of activities must one engage and what can be expected in return for the investment of time? How does one stimulate change in a situation in which all the characteristics of that situation are intended to insure stability?

Characteristics of Change Agents

Sergiovanni and Carver, summarizing the work of Alvin Gouldner, describe the cosmopolitan as a professional that is low on loyalty to the employing school, high on commitment to specialized professional skills, and likely to identify with an outside reference group. A professional with a local orientation is one that is high on loyalty to the employing school, low on commitment to specialized professional skills, and likely to identify with an inner reference group. Because of these differing orientations, the authors suggest, the locals tend to maintain the status quo at the expense of innovation.¹³ The change agent, then, must be less concerned with loyalty to the employing institution than with commitment to the specialized role which is to be played.

Following Seriovanni and Carver's definitions, the innovator cannot use as his primary reference group those individuals within the school system whose interests differ from his own. His reference groups must be other educators within the profession whose concerns are similar to his own and whose ultimate objective is the delivery of a quality educational program to youngsters in the inner-city.

The change agent must have high social status within the faculty of the institution in which he is attempting to generate some change. Other faculty members must value his perceptions, professional skills and professional orientation, even though in many instances they differ a great deal from

what their own happen to be. This observation implies that although the change agent has a primary reference group which is outside of the school, his behavior must be such that he is held in high esteem by those faculty members within the school whose behavior the change agent is trying to influence. His behavior, his attitudes and activities must be such that they do not alienate those individuals he is trying to change. They must be such that irrespective of the philosophical differences existing between himself and those whose behavior he is attempting to alter, faculty members within the school will respect him as a person and a competent professional educator in the field.

The change agent must have his goals clear in focus. In essence, he must know very clearly what he hopes to accomplish and how he plans to accomplish it. He must be able to set goals that are based on the sociological and psychological strengths of the inner-city population to whom educational services are being delivered. He must know the cultural strengths of students and must be able to illustrate how those strengths can be used as the focal point of educational programs developed for the target population. He must illustrate how various segments of the educational program can reflect the culture of the various persons participating in the program. He must know and be able to illustrate the skills teachers need in order to develop educational experiences which effectively capitalize on given strengths existing in the cultures of youngsters within the program. He must know and be able to illustrate when it is appropriate to use one method of instruction as opposed to using another as well as to demonstrate the possible outcomes of various instructional methods.

The change agent must, then, be a professional educator who can illustrate direct relationships between the cultural orientation of the students in the school and the methods of instruction used by teachers to facilitate the growth of those youngsters.

He must be in complete communication with the total environment of the school. In short, he must be aware of the informal group structure of faculty members within the formal structure of the school. He must be able to determine why various groups have organized and developed in the way that they have and know what groups can influence others. He must know formal kinds of relationships that facilitate communications within the formal structure of the school, have some understanding of the informal communicative system developing in the institution, and be able to identify direct relationships between the two.

The change agent must also be in complete communication with the external environment of the school. In other words, he must know how various community groups feel about the school and what they perceive to be the problems of the school. He must also have an understanding of the various community groups' perception of the school in general.

He must understand the dynamics of the community to the extent that he is able to determine which group and which individuals speak for whom and when and who is able to influence whom. In addition to knowing the structure of the internal and external environments, he must also be able to link the two in such a way that the end results can be productive.

A change agent must be able to foster an attitude of collaboration among his peers rather than resort to coercion. He must work with people in such a way that they feel a desire to collaborate with him or with other colleagues in their efforts to improve the quality of education in the school. He must realize that threats, insinuations and insults will not in any way help him accomplish his purpose. Above all, however, he must understand that the only changes which will have positive results are those in which the individual to be changed sees some value as a result of his interaction

with his peer group which has been heavily influenced by other factors in the environment but especially by the change agent.

A change agent must not expect to be rewarded by the institution or system he is trying to alter. If his activities are effective and successful to any degree, they will in some respects be a threat not only to the bureaucracy in general, but specifically to administrators within that bureaucracy. He must always remember that one of the objectives of the bureaucracy is the maintenance of stability or internal organizational consensus. Given this reality then, evaluations within the system will be based on the degree to which an individual's behavior fosters the goal of that system. When behavior is such that it may lead to change, then, that behavior will be perceived as being a potentially destructive force; consequently, the individual exemplifying such behavior will not be rewarded by supervisors or administrators within that structure.

The change agent must not anticipate that being rewarded in the traditional fashion will result in upward mobility within the system. His reward system must be so constructed that he receives gratification only when his efforts lead to changes in the teaching-learning setting, and to improvement of the educational services offered to youngsters in the school.

The change agent must remember that the greatest sources of change for any institution are legitimate external forces. If institutions are to change, they will usually do so because of exertion of external pressures which are accepted as emanating from legitimate authorities. That being the case, it becomes the responsibility of the change agent to maximize the potential of external legitimate authorities so that forces for change are exerted at effective pressure points within the school system.

The greatest potential external legitimate authority in inner-city school settings is the inner-city community which the school serves.

Contemporary developments are such that inner-city schools are increasingly being forced to respond to the community it serves mainly because such communities are demanding that schools accept and function in their traditional service roles.

The change agent's role, then, must be to disseminate information to the community in such a way that the community gains an understanding of the dynamics operating in the school. He must, then, work with the community to facilitate the exertion of pressure at the proper points within the school or the system. It must be emphasized that the role of the change agent in this situation is one in which he helps the community define individual and group goals consistent with the values and desires of the community in terms of directions in which it would like to go.

In attempting to mobilize legitimate pressures for action in the community, the change agent must move with those pressures in such a way that educational personnel within the system become aware of the real sources of their problems. After they become aware of the problems, then, the change agent must work with both groups, the community and the professionals within the system, in solving those problems. He must seek and provide information that will help both groups explore the implications of their activities. He must present the information in such a way that it has direct applicability to the problems existing in the school. As a result, then, the nature of the information is vitally important; for after the participants in this situation gain a clear and common perception of problems they are experiencing, they must receive information enabling them to build on a foundation leading toward constructive outcomes for the youngsters.

Robert Coughlan provides a rationale for developments in this kind of situation by indicating that individuals and groups change by moving through three phases. They begin at a point on a continuum in which they are closed

to the new idea being suggested. They must move or be moved from that point to one in which they are open to new suggestions. After receiving these suggestions, they must then be reclosed around a specific suggestion for improving their productivity in the setting.¹⁴

Applying Coughlan's model, then, to the present situation, the change agent begins performing his responsibilities with individuals who are closed; that is, individuals in the school setting functioning from premises which they feel to be accurate; consequently, they are not looking for new directions. The change agent must work with the individuals in the setting in such a way that they become aware that their behavior is contributing to the problem. As a result, they open up to new ideas. After being opened, the change agent must engage in information exchange with his client system enabling it to construct or reconstruct a set of attitudes and behaviors around a fund of knowledge that will help members become more effective in their endeavors.

After moving individuals through the awareness and informational phases of change, the change agent has the obligation of seeing to it that a plan of action is adopted; that is, all the information which the staff receives must be evaluated. Some means must be developed and established so that it is clearly understood how this information will produce a better learning environment for youngsters. When this procedure has been effected, the staff members must develop proposals for the solutions of selected problems since staff members are not functioning on information which is valid for their particular situation. They have changed their perceptions and they have information which will enable them to build a constructive program. The task at this point, then, is to develop proposals which seem to offer alternative opportunities for them to solve their problems in a constructive fashion.

After developing these proposals, then, staff members must adopt some means of phasing-in various solutions and undertake experimentation with various situations in the actual setting. After tests of an approach illustrates that it has promise, then, the final step is the adoption of the procedure by the total school.

It should be emphasized, in summary, that developing change agents for inner-city schools is by no means a simple task. Although the task may be defined in simple terminology, putting the concept in operation is extremely difficult. Based on the magnitude of the change agent's role, it may be necessary to define a role with various components allocated to a team of individuals assigned to various schools. If the dimensions of the role are too demanding for one individual and the team approach proves to be illogical, then, one may tend to conclude that schools as they presently exist cannot be changed. As a result, alternative forms of educational institutions and experiences must be developed and instituted in the inner-city to facilitate the educational development of inner-city children.

FOOTNOTES

1. Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott, Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach (1962), P.44.
2. Robert Coughlan, Change in Educational Institutions (Unpublished Lecture Series, The School of Education Northwestern University, January 1973).
3. Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott, Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach (1962), pp. 40-41
4. Ibid., p. 41
5. Robert Coughlan, op. cit.
6. Charles Perrow, Organizational Analysis (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), Chapter 3.
7. Robert B. Howsam. "Effecting Needed Changes in Education," Edgar L. Morphet and Charles O. Ryan (eds.), Designing Education for the Future No. 3. (New York: Citation Press, 1967), pp. 68-9,
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10. Ibid., p. 69.
11. Ibid., p. 70.
12. Ibid., pp. 70-71
13. Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Fred D. Carver, The New School Executive: A Theory of Administration (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), pp. 92-96.
14. Robert Coughlan, op. cit.